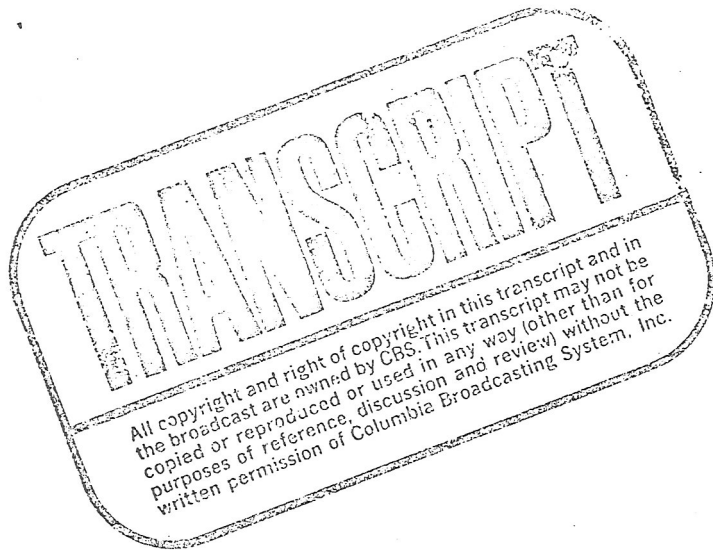




CBS NEWS SPECIAL

LBJ: "Tragedy and Transition"

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REPORTER: Walter Cronkite

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CRONKITE: Mr. President, on that tragic day in Dallas, when you heard that Jack Kennedy was dead, did it strike you right then: "I'm President of the United States"?

JOHNSON: I think the first thought I had was that this is a terrifying thing that may have international consequences, that this might be an international conspiracy of some kind. And I knew, of course, that I was on my own and that it was my responsibility and it was a thing that had to be dealt with quickly and calmly as you could be and as correct and as competent as you could be. And I tried to think it out, recognize the problems that faced me and the necessity of giving the nation and the world confidence as soon as I could.

CRONKITE: We all know your great strength of character, Mr. President, but it seems almost inconceivable that a man could deal so calmly with these decisions that had to be made, and with all these thoughts pouring through your head in a moment of such emotional - what would normally be turmoil. Did you kind of recognize this strength in yourself?

JOHNSON: No. But there had been some that observed my behavior through the years that have felt that if I was going to blow it, it would always be on a matter of little importance. And there was no question in my mind that this would require everything I had and perhaps more.

ANNOUNCER: In this broadcast, former President Lyndon Baines Johnson presents his account of the assassination of President Kennedy and its aftermath. This account and the two earlier broadcasts were edited by CBS NEWS from 13 hours of conversations with CBS NEWS Correspondent Walter Cronkite. The conversations were filmed last autumn at the LBJ Ranch in Texas. Certain material has been deleted from this broadcast at President Johnson's request, made on the ground of national security.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

CRONKITE: Mr. President, what was your personal relationship with President Kennedy?

JOHNSON: We were not like brothers, we were not constant companions. I don't recall that we ever had an element of bitterness or deep feeling enter into any of our discussions. He and I served as members of the House together, the House of Representatives. We were friendly, cordial, but not personally intimate. He and I served as members of the Senate together for several years. During the three years that he was President, he included me in the official meetings of importance. I believe in the Cuban missile crisis they had thirty-seven or thirty-eight meetings of the Executive Committee of seven or eight that met on that crisis, and I was there thirty-five times. So I look over that period, from the '40's - the late '40's to the early '60's that lasted almost two decades - I don't think of any - even in the tenseness of the campaign, that we, even in the periods when we were aligned on different sides of a question, which was very rare - that I ever saw any indication of anything but friendship and respect.

CRONKITE: What was the situation, as you built up towards this Texas trip, on your position on the ticket? Did you have any assurances yet that you were going to be on the ticket in '64?

JOHNSON: If you're asking did I seek assurances, the answer is "No." If you're asking did I believe I had assurances, that answer is a positive "Yes." I never distrusted President Kennedy. May be one of my weaknesses, I distrust very few people. But I never had any occasion to distrust him; he never indicated anything to me in his life that he didn't carry out to the letter. And in his next to the last press conference he was asked the question: "Do you want Lyndon Johnson on the ticket and do you think he'll be on the ticket?" And he said, "The answer is yes to both of those questions." I don't know how anyone could speculate in the light of that clear, definite impression.

He expressed to me his doubts about our popularity. He was very concerned about the situation, the political situation, prevailing in the country. No movement of our legislative program, no accomplishments or achievements of any importance - I don't think that's a fair statement. I'd say a majority of the things that he wished to enact had not been enacted. The Test Ban Treaty was a great accomplishment, but the things that he wanted like civil rights had been bogged down, and it caused him great loss of support, not only in the South but in other parts of the country: his elementary education bill, his medical care bill, his conservation measures. So his poll in Texas showed that only thirty-eight per cent of the people approved of what he was doing as President. And this poll pointed out that if we were to have any chance whatever in the '64 campaign against Goldwater, we had to have the state machinery and the popularity of the state administration and the leadership of the state Governor John Connally, because the Governor is a powerful leader in this state. And I think President Kennedy wanted to go to the people direct himself and show them that he was entitled to their support and a vote of confidence. And he also wanted to have the machinery of this state in back of him in the form of the Governor. And the polls so stated.

CRONKITE: Mr. President, did you have any concern about the President's safety here?

JOHNSON: Yes.

CRONKITE: Why?

JOHNSON: Well, I had concern about the President's safety anywhere, any time. But so many of our friends were concerned. We got letters on it. There were very ugly things being said. We'd had a terrifying and mortifying experience in Dallas in 1960, led by some public officials, encouraged by some of the leaders of the community, and they knocked Mrs. Johnson's hat off, they spit on us, they had very ugly signs. And Ambassador Stevenson went there later and had the same experience.

CRONKITE: Did President Kennedy ever express any concern about Dallas to you?

JOHNSON: Yes, he talked with me about his experiences with a group of newspaper editors, where a Dallas editor was present and gave him quite a lecture. And he was not unfamiliar with the situation in Dallas or the situation in Texas or the situation in the nation. And he discussed this with us. He felt by going there personally and visiting these places that he could generate support and change the situation. And I think he did. I think he would have. I think that he was well received in San Antonio. They stood out in the rain and heard him in Fort Worth. And there's not anything that can be as helpful to a candidate than to have a good audience response from the kind of people that you think in your judgment will elect you. And there are a lot of folks that sit in mahogany panelled offices that forget to go vote. But most of those people out there in that parking lot that morning had their candidate, and it was pretty apparent to the President and to me that it was Jack Kennedy.

The last words President Kennedy said to me in the presence of my baby sister in Fort Worth following his appearance at the parking lot and at the breakfast that morning - and it came to - it was about as near bragging as I ever heard him. He was enthused by the crowd that stood in the rain and met him there at seven - eight o'clock in the morning. He asked me to come up to his room, and I told him my sister's there and I wanted him to meet her. My sister, Mrs. Lucia Alexander, lived in Fort Worth at that time, and she's now moved to Memphis, but I wanted her - she's a favorite in my family. So he said, "Come right on up to the room, I'm going to change my shirt before I go out to the plane." And he said to me with my sister standing there: "You can be sure of one thing, we're going to carry two states next year - Massachusetts and Texas. We're going to carry at least two states." And I said, "We're going to carry a lot more than those two." And that ended the conversation. He told my sister good-bye and glad he met her, and we went down and went to our plane and he went to his.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

CRONKITE: Mr. President, now we get to the fateful moments of that tragic day in Dallas. Would you like to describe for us what you saw, what you felt during that motorcade?

JOHNSON: We left Fort Worth ahead of the President's Air Force One. We landed in Dallas around 11:30. We - Mrs. Johnson and I - got off the plane and shook hands with the group that was there to receive the President, and we moved back with the dignitaries and welcomed the President and Mrs. Kennedy as they came off the plane. He was happy, smiling, and I think stimulated, as I have said, by the Fort Worth experience that morning and by the previous day's experiences. And Mrs. Kennedy was radiant and looked charming and beautiful in that pink hat and pink suit.

They got in a big Lincoln with Governor Connally because the President rides with the first man of the state when the first man of the nation comes to visit. They got in the big Lincoln and drove away, and Mrs. Johnson and Senator Yarborough and I got in the car that was driven by a patrolman, and Rufus Youngblood was our Secret Service escort. And as we continued to drive, once we heard some

sound. Some thought it was a firecracker, some thought it was a gun, some thought it was a muffler on a car backfiring or something. But very shortly after the sound, the first sound, just almost instantaneously, the very competent, cautious Secret Serviceman jumped over the front seat and shoved me to the bottom of the Lincoln. He told Mrs. Johnson and Senator Yarborough to lean over as far as they could so they could get their head below the back seat. He got on top of me and he put his body between me and the crowd.

CRONKITE: This was Rufus Youngblood?

JOHNSON: And he had his knees in my back and his elbows in my back and a good two hundred pounds all over me. And the car was speeding up. He had a microphone from the front seat that he'd pulled over with him as he came over, a two-way radio talking and there was a lot of traffic on the radio and you could hear them talking back and forth, and one of them said: "Let's get out of here quick."

CRONKITE: Mr. President, the precise number of shots has been a matter of considerable controversy. How many do you remember hearing?

JOHNSON: I'm really not sure, Walter. I think I heard the first shot. I know Mr. Youngblood acted almost simultaneously. I heard reports about shots and exchanges about firecrackers or what might be mufflers. But I couldn't be sure. I know that I heard the first one, perhaps heard the others unless his body covering me kept the sound from coming in there. It may have muffled it, but I'm just not sure.

CRONKITE: Do you recall at all your first premonition of a major tragedy involved in this thing?

JOHNSON: Yes, I think that when they said, "Let's get out of here," and the next thing we were on the way to the hospital. They just almost shoved us into the hospital, into the first room that they'd come to down the corridor. They pulled all the shades in the room, closed it, and we sat there and endured the agony and waited for reports that came in from time to time.

CRONKITE: Now when did you first know that it was President Kennedy who'd been hit?

JOHNSON: I guess after we got into the room and people started coming in with reports who'd been outside and who had seen them go in, and then President Kennedy's staff and Secret Service agents were giving us constant reports. I suggested that maybe we ought to try to go up there, and the agents just - emphatic "No." And I suggested that maybe Mrs. Johnson then could go. And they agreed that she could. And a member of Congress, Congressman Brooks, was there and he escorted her and kind of protected her from the crowds along with the agents. And they took her up and she saw Mrs. Kennedy and talked to her and saw Mrs. Connally and talked to her. And we were just agonizing and hoping against hope that it was not a very - not serious down in the room until the fateful word came.

CRONKITE: When you first were told that it was the President who had been shot, did they thereafter sort of break it to you easily or did they right away tell you how serious it appeared to be?

JOHNSON: I think that they told me that the President had been shot and that Governor Connally had been shot. And that they were going to the operating room with Governor Connally and that the President was gone.

CRONKITE: Was gone. The very first conversation you had then, the first you knew about it was -

JOHNSON: No, we had reports that they had moved, that they'd taken the President in and the President was wounded. But I mean no one discussed the gory details how the President had been hit or anything of that type. The greatest shock that I can recall was one of the men saying, "He's gone." And it was -

CRONKITE: Who brought that word to you?

JOHNSON: Kenneth O'Donnell.

CRONKITE: Was there any sort of - on your part - momentary panic, all of this great load of responsibility being placed on your shoulders?

JOHNSON: No.

CRONKITE: Did you -

JOHNSON: Never had any responsibility like that, but I've not been free of problems and troubles all my life and responsibilities. And I was - my knowledge of history - I knew what had confronted Vice Presidents before.

CRONKITE: Did you have any feeling that you wanted to be alone a moment just to gather your thoughts?

JOHNSON: No.

CRONKITE: What was your first decision after hearing this news?

JOHNSON: To ask that the announcement be made after we had left the room and in an unmarked car and were en route to the Presidential plane, so that if it were an international conspiracy and they were out to destroy our form of government and the leaders in that government, that we would minimize the opportunity for doing so.

ANNOUNCER: President Johnson's account of the assassination in Dallas will continue in a moment.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

ANNOUNCER: We continue now with LBJ and CBS NEWS Correspondent Walter Cronkite.

CRONKITE: Mr. President, who made the decision that you should come back in the President's plane, Air Force One, rather than Air Force Two, which you had had throughout the trip up to then?

JOHNSON: I guess I did ultimately. It was suggested that we go to the plane and that we go there as quickly as we could and we go to Washington as quickly as we could. I won't recount all the details but I raised various problems and questions to those things, and we thought them out and exchanged views, and I was of the opinion that everyone felt that what we did was the thing to do. And I never heard any question about it for many months. I mean, the question about whether the President should ride in the President's plane - that came along a good many months later, a kind of afterthought.

CRONKITE: Nobody raised the question there at Dallas?

JOHNSON: No, not except that it should be done. When I got to the plane, I called the President's brother, the Attorney General, Bobby Kennedy, and asked his advice and judgment on where the oath should be taken, under what circumstances and who should administer it and so forth. And discussed it with him, and he gave me his immediate reaction, but said that he would check into it and call me back.

CRONKITE: What was his immediate reaction on this business?

JOHNSON: That the oath should be taken in Dallas at once. I said, "Well, I don't have the oath." He said, "Well, I'll have it given to you right away." And very businesslike, although I guess he must have been suffering more than almost anyone except Mrs. Kennedy. He told me what he'd do and he did it. And momentarily General Katzenbach called me and read the oath to my secretary, Miss Marie Fehmer, and she took the oath in shorthand. And Mrs. Kennedy arrived. We had decided and notified them that the plane would not take off until Mrs. Kennedy had arrived with the President's body. I wasn't going to leave without her. When she got there we had word that we'd made the arrangements for Justice - Judge Hughes and we were in the plane about fifteen minutes or less before Judge Hughes arrived. We took the oath and we were off.

CRONKITE: What is the urgency about taking an oath at once? Does it really matter that much?

JOHNSON: Well, I assume until you do - the oath is symbolic, and it means, I think, that you're the President in the public mind and in the minds of the people of the world. And as you know, there had been a good many speculations about my heart attack and my physical ability and things of that kind, and I guess that put most of them to rest, that I had physically moved from the hospital to the plane, that I had taken the oath, that I was the President and I think most important, Walter, that the country had a man in charge and a man in a position to act and make decisions. It's good for everybody to know that, here and abroad - that we're not rudderless, that we do have the person that the Constitution provides shall succeed to the Presidency, and he has already succeeded, and he is in a position to transact business and take whatever actions he needs to take to protect the Republic.

CRONKITE: Were you startled at the appearance of Mrs. Kennedy when she came to the plane?

JOHNSON: You use the word "startled." It was a tragic thing to observe. Here was this delicate, beautiful lady, always elegant, always fastidious, always the fashion plate. And I remember her getting off the plane in Dallas a few hours before and contrasting that with how she looked then and how she looked when she got back on the plane after that trip through the streets of Dallas and the hospital. And there she was, and what that morning was a beautiful, unsoiled, nicely pressed pink garment that was the last word in fashion and style and looks and that she got off the plane wearing, and she still had the same garment on, but it was streaked and caked and soiled throughout with her husband's blood. And Mrs. Johnson asked her if she wouldn't come in and let her help change her clothes, and she said, no, maybe a little later she would ask Mary if she wanted to do anything about it.

CRONKITE: Who was Mary?

JOHNSON: Marry Gallagher, her assistant.

CRONKITE: When Air Force One landed at Andrews Air Force Base, the first man aboard was Robert Kennedy, and the reporters afterward said that he brushed past you without a word to go to the back of the plane where Mrs. Kennedy and the body were. Did that happen and did you feel any offense at that moment?

JOHNSON: I don't recall that. I don't know. I would not have felt any offense in a critical period like that and carrying the burden and troubles that he was carrying. I would have thought that the natural thing to do was go as quickly as you could to the widow, Mrs. Kennedy, and to try to console her and give her strength. And I'm sure that's what he did and I would have found nothing improper in it. I worked with Senator Kennedy as Attorney General for several months after that, and there was no brushing by back and forth.

CRONKITE: Was the arrangement that had been made in Washington for the removal of President Kennedy's body a surprise to you?

JOHNSON: Yes.

CRONKITE: You had envisioned a little different arrangement in Washington, I gather?

JOHNSON: Well, I don't know that I had thought out all of the logistics of the leaving of the plane. But it didn't occur to me that the ramp would be removed and we would not be privileged to go down the same ramp with the body.

CRONKITE: Do you have any idea why that arrangement was made?

JOHNSON: No.

CRONKITE: Did you ever inquire?

JOHNSON: No.

CRONKITE: Considered it a family matter?

JOHNSON: No, I just observed it, as I did a good many things. And we had plenty of problems those days that were ahead, and this was something that was behind us.

CRONKITE: Mr. President, you can't help but ask, and putting this on the record, questions related to published reports of the trip back from Dallas, the decision to fly in Air Force One, the decision to take over the President's quarters on the plane, the relationship between you and the late President's staff on the plane. Was there any feeling of animosity at that point?

JOHNSON: Not that I was aware of until several months later because the President's staff people worked as my trusted confidants on my front door and back door. They were there serving me and serving the country. And Mrs. Kennedy and I were in frequent communication during all those early days, as we had been throughout the years. At least, during - certainly during the early days of my Presidency. And I have seen, heard these reports. I think there must have been a calculated effort on somebody's part, I don't know who, to try to make it appear that I didn't get along with the President's staff, although I employed them and asked them to continue to serve me and they did. One of them went into the Cabinet, and all of those who left, left of their own choice several months later. I know that there were stories about Mrs. Kennedy feeling aloof from me, but Mrs. Kennedy talked to me and expressed herself to me a number of times. And for the stories to have any merit at all, there would have to be a lot of hypocrisy involved, and I know that that term should never be associated with Jacqueline Kennedy.

CRONKITE: Now we come to the difficult decision you had about - the delicate decision - of moving into the White House itself. Would you like to recount your thoughts about that and the problems connected with it?

JOHNSON: Well, the physical location of my activity was not a matter of concern to me. The thing that concerned me and those around me very much was trying to give the world a picture of stability and to give them the confidence that would be worthy of their recognition and their support. And to do that, we had to have the assistance of some other people in other countries and here at home.

For instance, I thought it quite important that I have the cooperation and assistance of the former Presidents - of President Hoover, President Truman and President Eisenhower. I not only had their assistance and cooperation, I had their enthusiastic help. President Eisenhower got in his car and drove down from Gettysburg and sat in my office, borrowed a yellow note pad and a pencil and sat there for a good while and wrote out his views, his suggestions to a new President. He said, "The first man I'd call to Washington

is Robert Anderson. Ask him to come down here and counsel with you on the tax bill and on some of those other things." I asked him to come in the next day, and he did.

He said, "The second thing I'd do, I'd work out arrangements with the leadership, have a joint session of Congress and I would present my view to the country, and at that time I would say that we're going to have no special favorites, business or farmers or labor - they're all going to be treated fairly, and they need have no fear of this President."

He said, "The next thing I'd do is say to the Congress, we want to take up President Kennedy's program. Start with his tax program. He very wisely made some recommendation to Congress and let's get them acted on."

And so, with that memorandum as a basis, and with some of the suggestions I received from President Truman, and with the leadership meeting, I tried to pull in all these groups. And I thought that it was a rather formidable bulldozer by the time we got them in and got them in agreement to move forward. And we started moving forward, and legislation started moving, and the tax bill started moving, and the civil rights bill started moving. And we enacted practically all of President Kennedy's program. And while they didn't go as far in some instances as I wanted them to go on my program, they enacted practically all of the Johnson program.

CRONKITE: Mr. President, did the emergency created by the assassination teach us anything that we didn't already know about the problems in the transition of power?

JOHNSON: No, I don't think of anything. I was present the evening in Mr. Rayburn's office less than five minutes after Vice President Truman left there to assume the Presidency. And I studied that transition. I was there during it. I watched it. But I don't know how I could improve on it. I took everything I learned from it and I didn't follow it in some respects. I kept all of my Cabinet; he got rid of most of his. I said to all of the staff in the White House, "I would like for you to stay and continue throughout this Administration." I said to all the Cabinet, "I want you to stay in. Just as you served President Kennedy, serve me - because, after all, it's not something you serve one individual; you're serving the country. This is your country and you're peculiarly equipped by your experience and his trust."

And then I constantly had the picture in front of me that President Kennedy had selected me as his executor, his trustee, to stand in for him. He couldn't be there. He'd selected these men. How would I feel if I'd selected a group of men and left them in trust with certain responsibilities, and the first thing my successor did, he came in and started eliminating them and firing them and so forth? And I didn't think that would leave a good impression with the country. So I endured some handicaps, and I suffered some heartaches, some disappointments, because of my desire to try to present a united front and let nothing that I did create an excuse for division.

CRONKITE: What were the handicaps, the heartaches and the disappointments?

JOHNSON: Well, the difference in viewpoints and the very fact that some of the people who served did not share either the desire or the hopes that I had for the country and for the government, and that they, in effect, undermined the Administration and bored from within to create problems for us and leaked information that was slanted and things of that nature. A good many of them resigned at certain periods and left the impression that the government was not in keeping with their views and so forth.

CRONKITE: Mr. President, these people who resigned, who disappointed you, brought you heartaches - was there a pattern in their behavior and in their departure? Was there a leadership to the group? Was it a cult, was it a clique, and did it have a political objective - and was it led by Bobby Kennedy?

JOHNSON: I can't answer that question honestly and directly; I don't know. I don't believe that all of those left, left because someone directed them to or urged them to. I think they were grief-stricken. I think that they no longer felt that they could be up to what was required of them, that their relationship with the President was a special relationship that they couldn't transfer to some new person. And they went on to other fields. Some of the people who resigned, or who left the White House and went to other places in the government, are among the people I admire most for what they did for their country. Ted Sorensen, who I believed to be the President's principal personal counsellor, I thought certainly the ablest person in his vicinity, and perhaps the most devoted and dedicated to what was best for this country. He served me faithfully, but only a short period of time. I hated to see him leave. I think he honestly, conscientiously left on his own accord without any directions from anyone else, because he just felt that he - the White House would never be the same, the relationship was gone. It's just like a fellow, when he loses one of his loved ones, sometimes he wants to move and go to another part of the country and start over again.

CRONKITE: Of course the events in Dallas cast a shadow over the entire nation, but did you have a feeling that it cast a shadow over that year you served before your own election to the office? Did you feel you were operating under the handicap of a shadow?

JOHNSON: Yes, I had many problems in my conduct of the office being contrasted with President Kennedy's conduct of the office, with my manner of dealing with things and his manner, with my accent and his accent, with my background and his background. He was a great public hero and anything that I did that someone didn't approve of, they would always feel that President Kennedy wouldn't have done that - that he would have done it a different way, that he wouldn't have made that mistake. And when I had some minor Bay of Pigs, or missile crisis, or difficulties as he had with Khrushchev in Vienna and came back and added many billions to the defense budget and recommended to us and the Congress that we call up the Reserves - which we did to get ready for a crisis that really didn't develop - but when I had

those things happen to me there was a group in the country, and very important, and influential molders of opinion who I think genuinely felt that if President Kennedy had been there those things wouldn't have happened to him. And I hoped it wouldn't have. And maybe it wouldn't have. But it was a problem for me.

ANNOUNCER: President Johnson's account will continue in a moment.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

ANNOUNCER: We continue now with LBJ and CBS NEWS Correspondent Walter Cronkite.

CRONKITE: Mr. President, what made you realize in those early days that the doubts, alarms, fears of the population stemming from the incidents in Dallas were actually growing, that an inquiry had to be held rather than trusting this to the normal routine of justice, to the FBI?

JOHNSON: I think that everyone trusted the FBI report. But it was very evident that there was going to be a number of inquiries. The State of Texas was going to have an inquiry. It would have been pathetic to have a thing like this occur in the state and no one be interested enough to find out all the details about it. So the state did have a responsibility. Of course the FBI was already doing everything it could. Several committee chairmen announced that there was going to be an inquiry. So all during this period - I'd say the first week was when the decision was made that there had to be a judicious inquiry made by reputable people that would be respected, and that they had to have the power and subpoena and the finances to do what they needed to do. The question then was: Who was to do it? And how was it to be organized? And I believe I'd be fair in saying that I don't believe a single man wanted to serve on that Commission. I don't believe there's a single man that would have sought that as an activity or an assignment. All of them, because of their position, already had overburdened work to do and had assignments that they needed to give their attentions to.

And the Chief Justice sent me word that he had seen some speculation. And he came in, and the net of what he said was that he had concluded that it was unwise and unfair to ask the Chief Justice to serve on these things and he would not do it. And that was that. When he finished, I said, "You're a man who occupies one of the most important positions in this country and this country has been good to you. And it's recognized you and I know it hasn't made any mistake. I know that the merit that the country feels you have is justified. I remember somewhere seeing a picture of you in an Army uniform when this country was under - involved in war, where you went out and offered your life to save your country. And now your services are more necessary at this moment than they were then to save this country. And I'm not going to take no for an answer. And you're not going to tell me that if the President of the United States says to you that you must do this for your country so that we can resolve once and for all without any peradventure of a doubt, what happened here, that you're not going to say no, are you?" And he said, "No, I'm not." And that was that.

CRONKITE: Mr. President, Dallas is still sort of a national trauma. Do you think that we as a people learned anything from that terrible experience?

JOHNSON: Well, I'm not sure that I know what the answer to that question is. I know we've grieved a lot and I know we retraced our steps a lot, I know we tried to see, well, if we had not done this what would have happened.

I think, too, with the assassination of Diem as President of South Vietnam, the assassination of President Kennedy and the other violent things that had taken place about that time, or shortly after that, that everyone engaged in a little introspection. The nation itself did, and tried to improve its procedures and tried to legislate, to take some of the causes away like the gun legislation and things of that type, tried to give the FBI some better facilities and the Secret Service adequate appropriations and all of those things. I think we've learned that.

CRONKITE: Did you feel that your - well, you must have felt that your recommendations on gun control legislation went far enough. But there were a lot of critics who felt that they were lukewarm.

JOHNSON: No, I didn't know that. But everything didn't get to me. The only thing I know, nearly everyone thought I went too far in my recommendations for gun control legislation. And I thought that the people who thought that I went too far - and they were people who defeated the legislation - were people that didn't understand really what I was asking, and that they had been misled by propaganda and by leadership and by certain associates and things of that kind. This thought that we want to take guns away from people so that some foreign power can take us over, so the government can take us over, I don't have the slightest bit of sympathy for. I think that the person who has no evil intent, only wants a gun to protect himself from the rattlesnakes in the hills or the coyotes that are eating up his animals or that are preying upon the land, I think there's no reason why he shouldn't have it registered just like he has his car registered. I can understand why the criminal wouldn't want to register them, but I can't understand why the rancher wouldn't or why the homeowner wouldn't.

CRONKITE: Mr. President, looking back on it, would you have handled any of the details of that tragic day in Dallas, post-assassination, any differently?

JOHNSON: There's nothing that I'm aware of that I did about going to Texas, or coming back from Texas or about my relations with President Kennedy's family or President Kennedy's program that I would change. I felt I was a trustee that had the responsibility and the Constitutional requirement to carry on after he had been taken from us. I took his program and his family after he was fallen and I did everything that I would want a man to do for my program or my family if the same thing happened to me. And after I finished writing and completing and enacting and inaugurating and putting into

execution the dreams that he had, I started on my own. And I had some too. And I asked his brother and his family and his brother-in-law and his sister and his relations to help me and to stay in the government and to serve the country, because I needed them even more than he did. And every one of them (indistinct) And every moment of sorrow, I've been by their side. And every decision that I made concerning them has been made with the feeling that this is what I believe he would want done. And I don't want anyone to ever say that I ever let him down for a moment.

CRONKITE: Thank you, Mr. President.